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Hiding Intensity

Capt. Richard Kelley offers five WODs designed to for austere environments and participants who may need incentives to put effort into intense workouts.

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All images courtesy of Capt. Richard Kelley

The Air Force gets a bad reputation in terms of fitness in the military. A lot of this seems to stem from what some call the “Bike Test Days,” referring to a period when cycle ergometry was the primary means of measuring fitness in the Air Force. While those days are gone, and while fitness standards are slowly improving across the Air Force, the challenge I face as a physical training leader (PTL) is this: “How do you bring high-intensity, constantly varied functional fitness to the masses via our more traditional physical training (PT) program?”

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It's important to note that, for the purposes of this article, the term "traditional" refers to the idea that simply doing several sets of push-ups and sit-ups and then running for a length of time is enough as a PT program. It should also be noted that this article represents my views and in no way represents the official views of the U.S. Air Force. I am qualified as an Air Force physical training leader only. I have no other certifications to my credit. So take from the workouts in this article what you will. Finally, when I write about the Air Force, I am referring to what I've seen in the mission-support world and what I've heard from others in maintenance and ops. I'm sure there are exceptions, especially with special-operations forces.

Of course, one option for bringing functional fitness to the Air Force would be abandoning the traditional program, opening a box on every base and making CrossFit the Air Force PT program. While some bases, such as Luke Air Force Base and Ramstein Air Base, have affiliates, the Air Force is a long way from officially adopting CrossFit as a fitness program. However, I've attempted to introduce CrossFit-style workouts and principles to medium-to-large groups of varying fitness levels with minimal equipment available. I've include five sample workouts I've designed with the intention of encouraging feedback and ideas from other military members and the CrossFit community as a whole.

A Quick Note on Air Force Physical Training

The Air Force Physical Fitness Test (PFT) consists of one minute of push-ups, one minute of crunches, a 1.5-mile run and a waist-circumference measurement. For scoring, these components are weighted 10, 10, 60, and 20 percent respectively. As of January 2010, members have to pass this test twice a year to stay in the Air Force. Typically, squadron commanders will designate mandatory PT sessions, designed and run by PTLs, several times per week, usually for an hour or so. In theory, the intention of these PT sessions is not to get everyone ready for the PFT but to foster a "culture of fitness" and encourage individuals to continue to improve on their own time in the hopes that mission readiness and high PFT scores will result. In fact, the PFT itself is designed to measure the health of an airman and the effectiveness of a unit's PT program, not to be the last word on an individual's fitness.



Training with minimal equipment requires creativity, but great trainers can find a number of ways to give their athletes a great workout.



As most CrossFitters know, body-weight movements require little equipment but become very challenging when performed at high intensity.

Constraints and Challenges

If I had my way, CrossFit would be our fitness program. We would certify trainers on every base, train everyone on the foundational movements, acquire all the necessary equipment and follow the WOD to the letter. The reality is that I'm pretty low on the totem pole, and it's not my place to institute Air Force policy. Several other factors also make it difficult to implement CrossFit, even within a small unit:

- **Not everyone in the Air Force wants to improve his or her fitness.** I think the majority of the people I train genuinely want to improve their overall fitness and PFT score, but a few people are only working out because they have been ordered to do so. This is a fundamental difference between training at a gym (where a client pays for your services) and the fitness programs that I've been a part of in the military. Moreover, the larger a group, the harder it is to motivate those who are trying to get away with doing the least amount possible.
- **People are resistant to change.** It's harder than I thought convincing everyone that increasing the intensity rather than the length of the workout will improve overall fitness and PFT scores. A standard PT session is usually 40 minutes to an hour long. As we all know, most CrossFit workouts take less than half that time. Old habits die hard, and military habits are very old.
- **Equipment is not available.** Air Force gyms are typical of a civilian commercial gym but not necessarily as big. Most are WOD-friendly (meaning you won't be told to get your rings off the bars or anything like that), but there's just not enough room or equipment available for large groups. This makes incorporating strength training very difficult.
- **Ensuring fidelity of technique and quality is much harder than I realized.** Getting everyone to execute proper form on everything from push-ups to squats is a constant battle. I can't even imagine trying to incorporate Olympic lifts.
- **CrossFit requires that you put in the work and push yourself to get results.** Not everyone is willing to do that.

Fitting a Square Peg Into a Round Hole

The hardest part of training people who don't want to be there is getting them to work hard. To combat the problem, I started to design my group workouts around the constantly varied, high-intensity mantra while trying to hide the high-intensity part. To clarify, what I mean by "hiding intensity" is essentially tricking those people who usually slack off into pushing themselves past their comfort zone. So how exactly do you do that? As it turns out, half the battle is taken care of by constantly varying the workouts. I'm sure many CrossFitters can attest to beginning a workout that looked simple enough on paper only to find they were nearly on the floor halfway through. Fran, anyone? I found that many will put more effort into a new workout than one they know or remember to be hard. The other half of the battle is fought in three ways:

1. I reward intensity by building more rest time into a workout for those who complete a round faster. ("You want more of a break? I suggest you push through this next round faster than that guy at the finish line."). The trick here is that the more the group improves as a whole, the less rest time there is for the frontrunners, which in turn causes them to work that much harder, and the cycle starts over again.
2. I implement fouls for those who can't or won't complete a round (an idea I borrowed from Crossfit Endurance). For example, in a sprint workout the options are either line up for the next interval or "rest" in the plank or front-leaning-rest position.
3. I encourage group members to motivate each other as a team and to complete the workout like it's a mission. This is similar to the Full Mission Profile idea from Rob Ord of [Brass Ring Fitness](#) but scaled down for mere mortals.

You will notice that the workouts at the end of this article include mostly body-weight calisthenics and interval/distance training. As I mentioned above, there just isn't enough equipment available for large groups without a significant monetary investment. Furthermore, our PT programs are just beginning to come away from the old way of thinking. In the future, including cheap alternatives such as sandbags and homemade medicine balls to increase the variety and intensity of the workouts is the next step, but how do we move even closer to a real CrossFit program without a box? Can we get, say, even 50 percent of the benefits without incorporating elements like Olympic lifts, rings or other gymnastics movements? Is there a way to get more? I welcome any ideas or criticism. Until there's a box on every base, those of us who believe CrossFit is the future will have to continue to advocate where we can and make do with what we have.



With clever programming, athletes will find themselves working hard even if they hadn't intended to put forth their best effort.

Hit These WODs

The five workouts below I derived from ideas and exercises I've seen on the Internet, my own readings, and trial and error. I've tried to give credit where credit is due. Keep in mind that these workouts are intended to take up an allotted time frame, typically 40-45 minutes, but I'm sure they can be completed in much less time. To perform a workout, read these from top to bottom, moving from one exercise to the other without rest unless otherwise specified.



"Gonzos" are burpee long jumps, and they make for a challenging workout when done in combination with sprints and bear crawls.

Spartan Run (Push & Squat)

Total Time: Varies

This is a variation on an old classic. There's nothing new here, but the reps are a lot higher than most people I train are familiar with. This was eye-opening for most, but it showed them that they're capable of a lot more than they realized.

For time:

Sprint 200 meters
50 push-ups
15 squats

Sprint 200 meters
45 push-ups
20 squats

Sprint 200 meters
40 push-ups
25 squats

Sprint 200 meters
35 push-ups
30 squats

Sprint 200 meters
30 push-ups
35 squats

Sprint 200 meters
25 push-ups
40 squats

Sprint 200 meters
20 push-ups
45 squats

Sprint 200 meters
15 push-ups
50 squats

Total distance: 1,600 meters (1 mile)

Total push-ups: 260 reps

Total squats: 260 reps

Gonzos and Gassers

Total time: Approx. 25-30 minutes

This workout is performed traveling widthwise on a standard American football field and provides an example of rewarding intensity because the rest interval doesn't start until the last person finishes the round. There were two problems with this workout. Some people complained of becoming light-headed from the bear crawls. Keeping their head down was most likely the cause. We had a few people who took longer than I had hoped to finish the first round, which increased the rest interval. However, the gap between the first and last person closed by the second round. Next time I may split the group based on ability if there are significant differences in fitness levels. Unfortunately, there were not enough PTLs available to run several groups the first time this workout was performed. (The name "Gonzo" comes from an inside joke from which I'll spare you.)

Exercise directions: Gonzos (burpee long jumps) consist of performing a burpee, but instead of jumping straight up, you perform a long jump. Repeat until you complete the RX'd distance.

½ gasser: Starting on the sideline, you will run down to the opposite sideline, plant and sprint back to the first sideline.

5 Rounds for time of:

½ gasser

Rest 30 seconds

½ gasser

Gonzos (25 meters)

Bear crawl (25 meters)

Rest 30 seconds

(this rest starts when the last person finishes the round)

Approximate time per round: 5-6 minutes

Approximate total time: 25-30 minutes

2-4-6-8 Pace Tempo With Fouls

Total Time: Varies

This is my version of a tempo workout. I made sure to explain before we started this workout that its purpose is to get the body used to running at a target speed. I had the athletes break up into running pairs or groups of similar running ability to help with motivation. Again, I borrowed the fouls idea from Crossfit Endurance to give everyone that extra little incentive to maintain pace. I received a lot positive feedback from this workout.

Instructions: Break into run pairs or groups (about 3 people). All work is done on a standard 400-meter track. Establish tempo using tempo chart or run one lap as fast as possible to set your tempo at 85-95 percent of that.

Two rounds of:

Run 800 meters at tempo

Rest 2 minutes between rounds

(Fouls apply)

Four rounds of:

Run 400 meters at tempo

Rest 1:30 min between rounds

(Fouls apply)

Six rounds of:

Run 200 meters at tempo

Rest 1 minute between rounds

(Fouls apply)

Eight Rounds of:

Run 100 meters as fast as you can

Rest 30 seconds between rounds

Foul rules: If you exceed your tempo pace by more than 5 seconds in any round you must complete 15 burpees during your rest period. Take 30 seconds of additional rest before starting the next round after foul completion.

Total distance: 5,200 meters (3.25 miles)

Total rest time: 20 minutes

10-PUSH-10

Total Time: Approx. 38-40 mins

Believe it or not, nearly everyone finished this workout. My intention here was to re-introduce the concepts of a Tabata workout (we had previously done Tabata Something Else), Death by 10 Meters by Crossfit Endurance, and the classic pyramid style of workouts. I had mixed reviews on this one. Some really liked it, and others wanted to kill me.

Death by 10 meters:

(Run 10 meters on the minute, adding 10 meters every minute)

Fouls applicable if you fail to complete a round

Tabata squats:

8 intervals

Pyramid push-ups/sit-ups:

Push-ups: 2-4-6-8-10-12-14-16-14-12-10-8-6-4-2

Sit-ups: 3-6-9-12-15-18-21-23-21-18-15-12-9-6-3

Death by 10 Meters

Fouls applicable if you fail to complete a round

Fouls: Hold plank position until the end of the section.

Total push-ups: 128 reps

Total sit-ups: 191 reps

Total squats: Varies



Each athlete will bring something different to the table. The trick is to get each one to work at a level of intensity that's very challenging.

Full Mission Profile: Mortar Attack

Total Time: Approx. 30 minutes

This is my version of a Full Mission Profile, inspired by Rob Ord's work at Brass Ring Fitness. It is performed on a standard American football field. Keep in mind that I'm training mostly mission-support folks, so this is considerably scaled down from the Brass Ring workouts. Everyone seems to like these a lot. Again intensity is rewarded in the sprints.

Overview: You just arrived at a FOB on a C-130. The area you're in has been under frequent mortar attacks in the last few days, and it's necessary to move quickly from the aircraft to in-processing. Just as you're about to make it to in-processing, the base is attacked, causing a fire in some of tents and cutting off easy access to the nearest bunker.

Mission: Make your way to the closest bunker, avoiding mortar attack and the fire along the way.

Time/reps start when everyone gets to the line.

Get off the aircraft and get to in-processing:

5 minutes of:

Triangle (points about 20 meters apart)

1. Side shuffle to 2
2. Run to 3
3. Sprint to 1

Mortar attack with obstacles:

Sprint 100 meters
20 mountain climbers (4 count)
10 jumping jacks (4 count)

Sprint 100 meters
20 crawling push-ups
10 jumping jacks (4 count)

Sprint 100 meters
Front-leaning rest for 1 minute
10 jumping jacks (4 count)

Sprint 100 meters
20 jumping squats
10 jumping jacks (4 count)

Sprint 100 meters
20 lunges
10 jumping jacks (4 count)

Zig-zags (10 rounds on your own):

Sprint across width of field (approx. 50 meters)

- 10 push-ups
- 10 sit-ups
- 10 jumping jacks (4 count)

Crawl into bunker (bear-crawl width of field)

Total reps: 430 plus sprints, shuffles, etc.



About the Author

Capt. Richard Kelley is a communications officer in the Air Force. He's been following CrossFit since 2007 and Crossfit Endurance since early 2009, though he doesn't always stick to the main sites. He's currently stationed in Oklahoma, where he lives with his beautiful wife Erika, who surprisingly follows some of his workouts without wanting to kill him after. He also has what has been described as "a sick love of burpees."